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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 ROME 002990

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 10/23/2016
TAGS: [PREL](#) [PHUM](#) [UNSC](#) [CU](#) [VZ](#) [GT](#) [IT](#)
SUBJECT: ITALY: ON CUBA, DAS MADISON ENCOURAGES ITALY TO
PLAY A ROLE

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Classified By: Acting Political Minister Counselor Jonathan R. Cohen for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) Summary. WHA DAS Madison met with Italian officials October 23 to discuss the Cuba transition. Madison shared U.S. views and plans in light of the changing situation in Cuba. Stressing the fact that only the Cuban people could bring about change, she requested Italian help to open political and economic space on the island and internationally that could provide a context in which democratic change could take place. MFA U/S Di Santo agreed to use his personal relationships with key figures in Latin America to urge them to take a leadership role on Cuba. On development assistance, MFA DG Economides noted that Italy could provide aid bilaterally and through the EU, once there is a political green light. Madison requested Italian support for Guatemala on the UNSC. Di Santo said Italy was working with contacts in Latin America to encourage an alternative candidate in the Guatemala-Venezuela race. End Summary.

¶2. (U) Deputy Assistant Secretary for Western Hemisphere Affairs Kirsten Madison October 23 met with Italian MFA Under Secretary for Latin America Donato Di Santo, Deputy Director

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General for the Americas Roberto Spinelli and, separately, with Director General for Development Cooperation Alain Economides to discuss the Cuba transition.

GOI Evaluating Cuba Approach

¶3. (C) As Cuba moved from a dictatorship headed by a single revolutionary leader to some form of powersharing, Madison noted this was a time when the international community should consider how it could support a process of change in Cuba. Stressing that only the Cuban people could lead the process of change, Madison highlighted the importance of working to help Cubans connect with each other and opening a space to facilitate change, including by expressing solidarity with the Cuban people and raising activists' profiles. The United States, Madison said, had increased direct assistance to democracy activists and information programs.

¶4. (C) Welcoming Madison's visit as an important first exchange of views, Di Santo noted that he was requesting a meeting with Assistant Secretary Shannon at the beginning of December in order to begin a dialogue on Latin America and, above all, Cuba. Since the current Italian government had only been in power since the summer, Di Santo explained that they were still evaluating their foreign policy. He expected the review process would be completed soon and that he would be able to have a productive conversation with Shannon.

¶5. (C) In order to provide a personal context for his thoughts on Cuba, Di Santo detailed his several visits to Cuba, where he had been subject to an expulsion order on his final trip, and was sure he would not be issued another visa by the GOC. Personal experience aside, however, he explained that the GOI position on Cuba was fully in line with the EU common policy. Italy wanted to play a positive role in the transition, Di Santo said, and not a neutral one. He highlighted as extremely important Madison's comment that only the Cuban people can decide their future, noting that it takes the wind out of the sails of those who talk about interference.

¶6. (C) Madison said that Cuban nationalism would be a very important factor in the transition, and would have to be recognized and understood by the international community. While discussions on Cuba usually framed human rights issues in terms of political rights, Madison suggested that it might be useful to bring economic rights into the conversation. The economic relationship of the Cuban citizen to the state was a fundamental element of GOC control, she said. As the Sullivan Principles had been instrumental in using economic engagement to create pressure for change in South Africa, Madison expressed hope that countries that are economically engaged on the island would look for ways to use that engagement to create pressure for more economic rights. She noted that there was a document, the Arcos Principles, which

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was drafted by Cuban democratic activists and focuses on economic rights, that might be useful in framing an approach.

¶7. (C) Di Santo responded that Italy's position was the EU position, and that he would discuss our ideas with EU colleagues after meeting with Shannon. While acknowledging that the GOC fears and limits private activity on the island, Di Santo noted that he personally believed the U.S. embargo provided the GOC with an excuse for every problem. He asked Madison if the United States could look at the policy.

¶8. (C) In the absence of change on the island, Madison responded, a change in the embargo would reinforce the current situation rather than helping to bring about change. However, she stressed, the U.S. did not need to wait until Cuba had an established democratic government to engage: U.S. policy and law allowed for action as soon as the President believed he could certify to Congress that substantive progress on a transition had been made. Madison explained that the United States was planning concretely to provide humanitarian assistance, support the electoral process, and to work with the Cuban military, to the extent that institution refrains from human rights abuses. Our policy, she noted, was defined by the concrete signs of change. Di Santo said he would consider our views on the Cuba transition, and take the issue to the EU.

¶9. (C) Madison asked Di Santo, with his extensive personal contacts in Latin America, to urge key figures in the region to think about their role on this important issue, noting that we believe Brazil and Mexico are key countries. Di Santo said he was in complete agreement with this request, and that he would increase GOI activity in support of Latin American leadership on Cuba.

UNSC GRULAC Vote Abstention

¶10. (C) Noting our surprise at the GOI abstention on the UNSC Latin America Group (GRULAC) vote, Madison argued that a Venezuela seat could make work particularly difficult on the Council, and Venezuela lacked the votes to win. She urged Italy to vote for Guatemala, a country that could play a constructive role. Di Santo responded that, as FM D'Alema had stated, the GOI's position was based on Italy's interest--specifically the Italian community of approximately 1 million people in Venezuela, roughly 100,000 of whom hold an Italian passport. Acknowledging that the Italo-Venezuelan community was, for the most part, wealthy and anti-Chavez, Di Santo stressed that they were also affected by the GOV and were targets for kidnappings. He asked us to view Italy's abstention as potentially helpful to finding an alternative solution that did not include Venezuela or Guatemala. Di Santo said that he had spoken, on behalf of D'Alema, with various FMs and DFMs in Latin America to encourage such a solution.

Italy Can Provide Aid to Cuba When the Time Comes

¶11. (C) Speaking on development assistance, Madison explained to Economides that the United States was looking at possibilities for the international community to support the process of change in Cuba in more than a rhetorical way. Noting U.S. aid to the Cuban populace, she expressed hope that others would be willing to provide humanitarian and electoral assistance to support a process of transition. Economides said that at the moment Cuba was very low on the GOI's list of priorities for aid, and that a few years ago Italian NGOs had been thrown out of Cuba. However, he said Italy could offer humanitarian and capacity building assistance if there was a transition.

¶12. (C) At Economides' request, Madison explained that we work through NGOs from the United States and third countries to organize conferences, and provide wireless internet and library assistance, helping Cubans connect with each other. Economides explained that development assistance from Italy

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would only come when his office was given the political go-ahead, but that Italy would be willing to work both bilaterally and through the EU on aid to Cuba, and could provide food aid, reconstruction, and other types of assistance.

¶13. (U) This message was cleared by DAS Madison.
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